

Transfiguration
14/2/2010

Mark the Evangelist

Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-42
Luke 9:28-43

Sermon preached by Rev. John Hudson

Today's story of the Transfiguration marks the end of the Season of Epiphany and brings us to the brink of Lent. The scripture readings, preaching, and liturgies of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany have brought with them a certain measure of human hope that all will continue to go well for Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, the pubescent pupil in the Temple at Jerusalem, and the manly teacher and healer, attracting the crowds as he meanders through the Holy Land. And why shouldn't hopes be high, for at the biblical "book-ends" of Epiphany are Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration, and on both occasions the voice of God from heaven declares that Jesus is indeed the beloved Son of God, His Chosen One (Lk.2:41-51&9:28-36). However tenuous, to some extent we think we know who he is.

But the strangeness of the Transfiguration both for us and Peter, James and John, moves from an area where we feel that we know who this Jesus is, the teacher and healer, to a situation which is beyond our comprehension and therefore beyond our control.

This event drawing on the faith of Israel in the presence of Moses and Elijah and the nascent trembling faith of the Church of James and John, are uniquely united in the incandescent appearance of Jesus.

So much can be drawn from this event that the selection of only one word would seem to do the story a disservice. But it is Paul in today's reading from 2.Cor. that makes the choice for us. He says, in 3:18. "all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit".

The thing that has to be acknowledged right at the outset is that our experience of God—glorious or otherwise is the work of God from beginning to end. For the location of God's glorious joyousness is in the experience of himself as Father Son and Holy Spirit. Yes, that's right! The love, the joyous interaction as something God alone knows as His glory, is graciously shared with all His creation. Not an isolated cosmic power source that manipulates earthly and human events simply because He can, but a divine community where Father, Son and Holy Spirit as persons are One in joyous and glorious unity. This glory he chooses to share with us as the Father who sends the Son (in whom He is well pleased) in the power of the Spirit, so that as Paul says we may be transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another through the Spirit.

So Jesus' transfiguration was a momentary experience for Moses and Elijah and the Apostles as a means of assurance concerning the things for which the church hopes; namely, that Jesus is the Promised one, the one in whom God is well pleased, the one who will take up the prophetic life of Israel as the Moses and Elijah and all the other people of God towards the promised land of God's Glory .

But his leadership, his exodus of which he spoke to Moses and Elijah will be accomplished by him and him alone at the direction of the Father in the strength of the Spirit. This display of God's glory will happen only through his suffering and death. For those who follow him it is incomprehensible that this should be the way and the fate of the Chosen One of God. Is it any wonder that Peter should want to build three dwellings there on the mountain to contain what surely would be the peak experience of God's glory and a suitable object of worship. But as the cloud descends upon them—the ancient sign of the presence of God that lead the people of God to the promised land—a voice says "this is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him". Here again Paul comes to our aid in a few verses on from where the epistle reading finished when he says, "for it is the God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2:Cor.4:6).

Discipleship in its costliest and glorious form is to hear him say 'take up your cross'.

This knowledge of this glory now seen in the face of Jesus Christ will form the life of those who listen to him and provide them substantial hope that receives its fulfillment, its completion, its justification at the end of all things, when God brings about a new heaven and anew earth.

The inspiration for our first him 'Immortal, invisible. . .' comes from 1 Tim 6:16, and the last hymn 'Christ is the world's light' from the event of the Transfiguration. Such hymns and scripture readings provide grounds for the words of the Westminster Confession: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.'

The Glory of God is seen in face of Jesus Christ....AND...
If we have seen him we have seen the father!
